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ALBERTA COUNCIL
ON ADMISSIONS & TRANSFER

2013-14 Annual Report



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ACAT Annual Report 2013-2014

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Message from the Chair

Dear Honourable Minister Scott, QC:

On behalf of the Alberta Council on Admissions and Transfer (ACAT), please find enclosed ACAT's Annual Report for the year ending March 31, 2014.

It has been a year of transition for ACAT as a number of Council member terms came to an end, including that of ACAT Chair Ron Woodward in late 2013. Despite the significant turnover on Council and the time required recruiting both Council representatives and a Chair, ACAT continued to provide leadership for learner pathways, mobility, and transfer in Alberta's post-secondary system. This was achieved in great part through the foundations created by Ron Woodward and Council and the commitment and leadership of ACAT Vice-Chair Dr. Robert Boudreau, who ensured ACAT's initiatives continued forward, supporting the collaborative vision of Campus Alberta.

These key initiatives included: completion of a new visual identity/branding for ACAT and Transfer Alberta, initiation of development for a Transfer Alberta Mobile Application, launch of a new monthly stakeholder/system communication *Spotlight*, completion of three new Student Mobility Reports regarding student enrolment flow and tracking for publicly funded institutions (with the support of Ministry Learner and Enrollment Reporting System staff and institution-approved data), and participation on the Provincial Dual Credit Steering Committee in support of the Provincial Dual Credit Strategy.

ACAT's articulation committees are also a key initiative, facilitating collaboration, relationship building, and mobility. The past year saw ACAT articulation committees struck in Mathematics and Statistical Sciences, and Studio Based program areas, bringing ACAT's articulation model to 13 committees with further expansion in progress. Articulation committees foster and strengthen relationships between program heads, faculty, and ACAT through the sharing of information, discussion of issues, collaboration and the creation of pathways and support for student mobility and transfer agreements.

ACAT has also continued to explore the role of learning outcomes in facilitating student mobility. Learning outcomes offer an approach to student mobility that promises to provide avenues to develop new learner pathways for students moving between post-secondary institutions, from secondary to post-secondary, and returning to post-secondary from the work place, including through Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR). ACAT's Learner Pathways Sub-Committee has been examining learning outcomes research and models in an effort to determine how Council can assist in supporting students and institutions regarding student mobility in Campus Alberta. ACAT's Admissions Sub-Committee has also begun to discuss ways to gather and share information regarding admissions practices and their effects on learner pathways and mobility.

Recognizing that pathways and mobility exist within and beyond the borders of Alberta, Council participates and provides leadership on regional and national dialogue. This dialogue occurs both directly with other jurisdictions, as well as through bodies like the Western Canadian Consortium on Admissions and Transfer (WestCAT), Pan-Canadian Consortium on Admissions and Transfer (PCCAT), and Canadian Association for Prior Learning Assessment (CAPLA). Council's support for the ARUCC/PCCAT *National Project Transcript Guidelines and Transfer Credit Nomenclature Study* is one key highlight.

On behalf of ACAT, I would like to recognize the contributions of our current and outgoing Council members, especially their understanding of and passion for Alberta's post-secondary system. Their efforts, along with those of all Alberta Transfer System member institutions, the ACAT Secretariat, and the Ministry support Campus Alberta and student success.

Sincerely,



DR. ROBIN A. FISHER
Chair

Directional Statement

ACAT represents a balanced voice for Campus Alberta. ACAT provides leadership to influence policy, highlight/promote best practices, and create a system for access that serves all learners.

Mandate

Established in 1974, the Alberta Council on Admissions and Transfer (ACAT) is an advisory agency accountable to the Minister of Innovation and Advanced Education and, in support of Campus Alberta, responsible for providing advice and guidance regarding post-secondary admission and transfer policy.

ACAT works with its stakeholders for the benefit of learners to ensure smooth transitions from secondary to post-secondary and post-secondary to post-secondary.

Vision

Alberta's post-secondary institutions work cooperatively to provide a transfer system that is responsive to the needs of learners in the matters of admissions, transfer credit, and recognition of prior learning.

Mission

The mission of ACAT is to be a catalyst for beneficial change and an advocate for learners in the areas of post-secondary admission and transfer throughout Campus Alberta. ACAT provides leadership and direction, as a cornerstone of Campus Alberta, in the improvement of educational opportunities for Alberta students through inter-institutional transfer. ACAT is committed to supporting and improving communication among Alberta post-secondary institutions and to promoting the advantages of a system of education, with all that this means for educational planning for the benefit of learners.

Operating Principles

The Council endorses the following as basic to its purpose and activities:

- (a) Support for Campus Alberta's core objectives by facilitating learners to successfully navigate the Transfer System and foster lifelong learning in the advanced education system.
- (b) Student access to higher education and the opportunity for student mobility from secondary to post-secondary and post-secondary to post-secondary in Alberta shall be optimized.
- (c) Negotiation of opportunities for student mobility shall be based on the recognition that while learning experiences may differ in a variety of ways, their substance may be virtually equivalent in terms of learning outcomes and rigor.

- (d) Effective academic advising, career counseling and optimum mobility require that the student have prior knowledge of at least the minimum transfer credit which can be awarded.
- (e) Individual institutions have the primary responsibility for instructional programs, even though responsibility for higher education is shared among various constituents. The responsibility of institutions includes program design and delivery, determination of academic prerequisites and student admission criteria, and certification of the academic achievement of students.
- (f) Institutions have the responsibility and the prerogative to investigate the total educational background of applicants seeking admission.
- (g) Post-secondary institutions are committed to developing and maintaining clearly stated policies and procedures for consideration of transfer credit and to applying them in a consistent manner.
- (h) After students are granted admission to an institution under a transfer arrangement, they shall be granted the same rights and privileges as students who began their studies at the institution.

Goals and Priority Initiatives

ACAT identified five goals and associated priority initiatives in its *2013-2016 Action Plan* to guide the Council's and Secretariat's activities. ACAT's focus on leadership, collaboration, research, technology, learner pathways and mobility will be reflected within each of the goals and their accompanying priority initiatives.

Goal 1

Articulation Committee Model

Articulation committees will continue to bring program heads, faculty and Alberta Education, in a given area of study, together to develop closer collegial relationships, exchange information and discuss issues related to admissions and transfer.

Initiatives:

- Articulation Sub-committee to review committee model, including process to identify areas for expansion and to ensure sustainability.
- Continue to expand the number of articulation committees in the Transfer System by two annually.
- Hold annual articulation committee chair meeting.
- Articulation Sub-committee/Council engage articulation committees regarding key ACAT research questions and initiatives (e.g., learning outcomes).

Goal 2

Admissions Practices

Admissions Sub-committee will undertake initiatives reflecting ACAT's increased focus and communication on admissions-related issues and learner pathways from secondary to post-secondary.

Initiatives:

- Conduct survey of Transfer System member institutions to develop an overview and understanding of the current admission practices.

- Engage the Transfer System Contact Persons in discussion on issues related to admission practices at their annual fall meeting.
- Develop a repository/mechanism for sharing admissions information, data, and resources (e.g., high school transitions, dual credit, high school credentialing) with students and counselors and other stakeholders in the K-12 and post-secondary systems.
- Admissions Sub-committee/Council engage stakeholders regarding key ACAT research questions and initiatives (e.g., promising practices).

Goal 3

Learning Outcomes

ACAT will continue its examination of the role of learning outcomes in the development and broadening of learner pathways through best practices and models for an outcome-based Transfer System.

Initiatives:

- Complete a review of a sample of existing by-program agreements through a comparison of learning outcomes, including identification of a common understanding of a working definition for learning outcomes.
- Develop a pilot block transfer agreement that is founded on identified learning outcomes and is informed by the lessons learned from the sample review of by-program agreements.
- Learner Pathways Sub-committee/Council engage stakeholders regarding key ACAT research questions and initiatives (e.g., block transfer, ACAT/third party learning outcomes research).

Goal 4

Communication

ACAT will increase engagement and communication with and among Alberta's advanced learning system stakeholders to support learner pathways initiatives and student success.

Initiatives:

- Ensure ongoing, regular dialogue between ACAT Chair/Council and Innovation and Advanced Education Senior Ministry officials.
- Contribute to key government initiatives (e.g., funding model and tuition review).
- ACAT will seek out opportunities to enhance communication with and between system stakeholders, including engaging key stakeholders with ACAT's *Spotlight* communication.
- Facilitate provincial conversation about key research topics with ACAT, Campus Alberta Quality Council, and other stakeholders (e.g., student groups, ministries) to increase secondary and post-secondary dialogue.
- Provide students, Student Advisors and other key institution staff with enhanced Transfer Alberta technology tools, information, and training opportunities.
- Assess the viability of the Transfer Agreement Archival Retrieval System (TAARS) and the need for the development of a modernized transfer tool.

Goal 5

Governance

ACAT will review and align its governance documents and processes to align with the *Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act*, Government of Alberta priorities, and ACAT's new directional statement and priorities regarding leadership.

Initiatives:

- Revise Mandate and Roles; Code of Conduct; Principles, Policies and Procedures; Governance Recruitment and Structure documents, and Position Profiles.
- Revise the Alberta Transfer System Membership application and process, including key documents and policy.

Results

Council and the Secretariat have made a number of accomplishments in support of ACAT's 2013-16 *Action Plan* goals and priorities and its core business and ongoing operational requirements. The following bullets highlight ACAT's key relevant learner pathways, mobility, and transfer system activities/results for the 2013-14 Annual Report.

Goals 1 – 5: Research/Data to Support Pathways, Access and Mobility

- > **System-level Student Mobility:** In 2011, over 265,000 full-time and part-time students were in the post-secondary system in 26 publicly funded institutions in Alberta. In 2012, approximately 155,000 (just under 60%) of these students continued in the system, with approximately 16,500 of those students demonstrating system mobility by continuing at a new institution.
(Note: Numbers reflect recently updated Alberta Student Number (ASN) information (e.g., account for deleted/retired ASNs) and have been rounded to the nearest half thousand.)
- > **New Student Mobility Reports:** In December 2013, ACAT completed three new Student Mobility Reports focused on student enrolment flow and tracking for public institutions and Alberta's six sectors in Campus Alberta and the Alberta Transfer System. These reports are posted on the "Research" page of ACAT's website, replace the previous ACAT Transfer Patterns reports (last published in 2011), use institution-approved Learner and Enrollment Reporting System data, and will be updated on a yearly basis. Additional types of mobility reports are planned.
- > **Institution Transfer Agreements:** Currently, there are more than 77,000 transfer agreements made available to students by Alberta Transfer System member institutions via Transfer Alberta. This includes over 32,000 by-course and 900 by-program Active transfer agreements and over 44,000 Grandfathered/Terminated agreements. In 2008–09, there were over 73,000 transfer agreements. (Note: Numbers have been rounded to the nearest thousand.)

- > **Graduate Outcomes Survey, Transfer Graduates Report:** Since 1998, the Government of Alberta and publicly funded post-secondary institutions have collaborated to conduct a biennial survey of graduates to assess outcomes. Results from the last four surveys (2003-04, 2005-06, 2007-08, 2009-10) indicate that between 88 and 90 per cent of transfer graduates surveyed were satisfied with the transfer credit they received.
- > **Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR):** Between 2009/10 and 2012/13, a total of 20 institutions have reported enrolments related to PLAR credits awarded to students in Alberta.
- > **Provincial Dual Credit Steering Committee:** The 2013 ACAT Chair participated as a post-secondary representative and Co-chair of the Provincial Dual Credit Steering Committee for Alberta's Provincial Dual Credit Strategy. The Ministry/ACAT Secretariat also provide ongoing support for this work.

Goals 1 – 5: Pan-Canadian Activities to Support Pathways, Access and Mobility

- > **Pan-Canadian Collaboration—Western Consortium on Admissions and Transfer (WestCAT) and Pan-Canadian Consortium on Admissions and Transfer (PCCAT):** Advocated for the enhancement of student access and mobility and research locally and on the national level through participation on WestCAT and PCCAT. ACAT hosted and facilitated dialogue at the annual WestCAT and PCCAT conferences in 2013. ACAT also began regular meetings with the provincial councils on admissions and transfer (CATs) (Alberta, BC, Ontario, and New Brunswick) and participated in the first CATs panel session with its provincial partners. Discussions regarding student mobility and information sharing were also held with Saskatchewan and Manitoba.
- > **Canadian Association for Prior Learning Assessment (CAPLA):** Alberta/the ACAT Secretariat participated in the annual CAPLA conference and sessions, and began participation on a Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Strategic Advisory Panel in support of the Canadian Association for Prior Learning Assessment's (CAPLA's) three-year *Pan-Canadian RPL Quality Assurance Project*.

Goal 1: Articulation Committee Model and Collaboration, Influence, and Mobility

- > **Articulation Committees:** Two new articulation committees were initiated, Mathematics and Statistical Sciences and Studio Based. A total of 13 ACAT program area, system-led articulation committees are now present with further expansion in progress, including planned review of the articulation committee expansion model.
- > **Articulation Sub-Committee and Annual Articulation Committee Chair Meeting:** Facilitated and participated in the Articulation Chairs annual meeting, including information sharing about British Columbia Council on Admissions and Transfer (BCCAT) learning outcomes research (John Fitzgibbon) and Alberta learning outcomes research (Dietmar Kennepohl and Sociology Articulation Committee), as well as regarding BCCAT articulation committees and possible Alberta/BC articulation relationships. New SharePoint tools and articulation committee templates were also developed and shared with the Chairs for committee use. Chairs also identified key issues and shared best practices regarding admissions and transfer. Research to base future articulation committee expansion on student mobility and transfer agreement data continues.

Goal 2: Admissions Practices and Collaboration and Mobility

- > **Annual Contact Persons' Meeting 2013:** Facilitated and participated in the annual Contact Persons' meeting and gathered initial feedback on key questions to inform/design a Contact Persons' survey to be given in 2014, including gathering admissions contact information for all Alberta Transfer System institutions.
- > **Admissions Sub-Committee:** Initiated plans for information gathering of current admission practices to identify best practices.

Goal 3: Learning Outcomes and Collaboration and Mobility

- > **Learner Pathways Sub-Committee:** Continued to explore how transfer arrangements can be facilitated through the use of learning outcomes, including dialogue regarding the Sociology Articulation Committee's learning outcomes survey and dialogue with a 3rd party researcher (Dietmar Kennepohl) regarding his learning outcomes research, results, and recommendations.

Goal 4: Communication and Information, Access, and Mobility

- > **Minister Meetings and Ministry Dialogue:** Completed a strategic planning session with Council, including the Ministry's Deputy Minister; Assistant Deputy Minister, Advanced Learning and Community Partnerships, and Executive Director, Business Integration and Learner Pathways. The ACAT Chair also engaged in a key meeting with the Minister regarding ACAT, pathways and mobility, and the system, including key leadership, research, collaboration, resource, and technology goals and priorities.
- > **Monthly Spotlight Communication:** Launched a new stakeholder/system monthly communication—*Spotlight*—to highlight learner pathways and mobility activities and stories for institutions and other key stakeholders with a focus on admissions and transfer.
- > **Information Sessions, Meetings, and Training Opportunities:** Provided sessions and information regarding learner pathways and mobility, the Alberta Transfer System and Transfer Alberta (including TAARS training), and the role and work of ACAT to key groups, including student groups and student leaders (Council of Alberta University Students, the Alberta Students' Executive Council, Learning Clicks Ambassadors, and other Alberta post-secondary student leaders) and Contact Persons.
- > **Annual Contact Persons' Meeting 2013:** ACAT's Chair and Secretariat facilitated and participated in the annual Contact Persons' meeting, engaging in direct information sharing, input, and dialogue regarding key system issues and ACAT initiatives.
- > **Transfer Alberta Mobile Application:** Initiated development of the Transfer Alberta Mobile Application, including engagement with a system-led Advisory Group (e.g., representatives from Contact Persons, secondary and post-secondary student advisors, and students).

- > **New Visual Identity/Branding:** A new visual identity/branding was developed for ACAT and for Transfer Alberta that reflects learner pathways and student mobility, admissions and transfer, lifelong learning and growth, and the relationship between Council and the transfer system.



Goal 5: Governance and Leadership, Membership, and Direction

- > **Mandate and Roles:** Completed and received Ministry approval for a revised Mandate and Roles document (August 2013). As per APAGA requirements, the Mandate and Roles document is posted on ACAT's website and on the Agency Governance Secretariat website.
- > **Membership Sub-Committee and Council:** ACAT approved Columbia College's membership application into the Alberta Transfer System, making Columbia College the 39th Alberta Transfer System institution member.
- > **Non-Alberta Transfer System Member Agreements:** Effective November 2013, Non-Alberta Transfer System Member Agreements may be shared provincially, allowing all transfer system member post-secondary institutions to share the transfer agreement; they may have with non-members in Transfer Alberta. Inclusion of these agreements in Transfer Alberta is at the discretion of the institutions and may include institutions inside and outside of Alberta.

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Note: Language and information in the Council membership list is up-to-date as of the publication date of this Annual Report. There are also two nomination processes currently in progress. Once identified and appointed by the Minister, these two Council members will represent the Comprehensive Academic and Research Institution and Comprehensive Community Institution sectors respectively.